*The Grapes of Wrath*

John Steinbeck PLOT DEVELOPMENT

The author crafts a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and develop characters. The pacing of events can make a novel either predictable or riveting. Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy the constraints of time. Sometimes an author can confound a simple plot by telling stories within stories. In a conventional work of fiction, the peak of the story’s conflict—the climax—is followed by the resolution, or denouement, in which the effects of that climactic action are presented.

While the plot structure of this book is NOT conventional, there are many moments in the novel that can be seen as turning points.

Discussion:

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| TURNING POINTS | Why is the moment significant? | What consequences does this have for other characters?  (focus, esp. on Tom, Ma, and Casy) |
| the death of Grampa |  |  |
| the death of  Granma |  |  |
| Noah’s desertion |  |  |
| Connie’s  desertion |  |  |
| the bank’s eviction of the tenant farmers |  |  |
| the revival of hope when the  Joads arrive at the government camp |  |  |
| the scuffle with the deputies |  |  |
| ANOTHER? |  |  |

READ THIS ARTICLE TOGETHER:

(from “The Reader’s Guide” from the NEA’s *Big Read* program)

**The Novel at the Movies**

Within twenty-four hours during December of 1939, John Steinbeck had an experience unsurpassed in the whole long tango between literature and Hollywood. After traveling down to Los Angeles, he and his wife Carol got their first look at not one but two new masterpieces made from his work: *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath.*

Of the latter film, Steinbeck himself claimed that, "[Producer Darryl] Zanuck has a hard, straight picture in which the actors are submerged so completely that it looks and feels like a documentary film and certainly has a hard, truthful ring.... It is a harsher thing than the book, by far. It seems unbelievable but it is true."

We should take Steinbeck's claim with a large grain of salt, but also recognize the genuine cinematic artistry that enabled him even to compare the filmmakers' achievement with his own. Screenwriter Nunnally Johnson stands as first among equals beside his colleagues. Johnson reversed the Joads' stays in the two migrant camps, allowing the more humane government-run sanitary facility to come last, and blunt a bit of the novel's bleakness. He also bowed to the censors' expected rejection of the book's final, unforgettable image, transposing a speech of Ma's to improvise an ending hopeful enough to pass muster, yet plaintive enough to generate real, productive anger among audiences.

Johnson's was one of seven Oscar nominations for *The Grapes Of Wrath,* but only Jane Darwell's performance as Ma and Ford's direction won their categories. The film is director John Ford’s most atypical movie and, for some, stills his best. It's not a western, except geographically. It's about survival, not gallantry, and John Wayne is nowhere in sight. Instead Ford relies on the lantern-lit cinematography of Gregg Toland and the remarkable work of his actors. Besides Darwell's heroic incarnation of Ma Joad, the ensemble includes Henry Fonda in his iconic Oscar-nominated role as Tom, John Carradine as Jim Casy, and the luminous Dorris Bowdon as Rosasharn. Ford once said, "The main thing about directing is: photograph the people's eyes." There's hardly a face in the picture that doesn't stare back at the audience in tacit accusation.

Some filming took place near the actual sites that Steinbeck and his friend, Tom Collins, visited during research for the novel. Collins, director of the compassionately run Weedpatch Camp in Arvin, California, was a consultant on the film, ensuring as much accuracy as possible. The result is a starkly beautiful movie, suffused in every scene with the intensity of craftsmen working on what even they must have suspected was the most important picture they might ever make.

*The Grapes of Wrath*

John Steinbeck

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

In-class #6:

creative response

Imagine you are making a movie of the novel. You have to cut certain scenes from the novel because of limited running time. Suggest two scenes that you would drop. How does cutting each scene change the structure? Does it improve the story in any way? Explain the reasons for your choices.